

Meeting the gods at

ANGAMA MARA

Set on the slopes where the film, *Out of Africa* was shot 30 years ago is **Angama Mara**, the newest property taking the world renowned Masai Mara by storm.. **Rupi Gill** recently visited the property and shares her experience.



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The Land Rover grinds sideways up the ravined river bed, once a widened animal track.

We bump, ahead. My mind is aware of my surroundings, my breath, my heartbeat and my twitching muscles. Perhaps I have already become an antelope.

Isak Dinesan, once said *"You know you are truly alive when you're living among lions"*

At Angama Mara they quote Karen Blixen - whose nom-de-plume was Isak Dinesan - often.

Steve Mitchell, his face lit by a stream of lanterns sits opposite me at last night's bush barbecue and I think he is saying *"If you have time, go to the beach; if you don't, have an adventure and a Safari is the best adventure you can have in a short time"*.

Steve is one of the directors' and our host this evening. After an endless mezze of humus, guacamole, charbroiled meats, a fish in wine and home-made breads with abundant grilled vegetables, there is time to enjoy the distant whoop of a hyena with a glass of wine. Steve is also the



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chief sommelier with a vision that includes wine-tasting for the locals. The staff hug him when he arrives and I note a vim in the greeting from the gardener and the askari.

We arrive elated and I soak in the kiln-like shapes. I've seen them before. Steve reveals later, they pay homage to the ruins of the great stone kingdom of Zimbabwe. Around the 13th century, the kingdom covered Africa's mineral rich plateau. Reflected here, in the copper lights, brass taps and silverware which vibrate with Maasai red and purple, quietened with modern grey and softened with green. Water features weave through the architecture. The Maa lands

of Oloololo, meaning serpentine, ramp out beyond the giraffe at the watering holes. Almost 2000ft above sea level, the sun's rays are sharp and the winds equally tart.

We sit wrapped around a roaring fire, captured by the Maasai's *Adamu dance*. A honeymooning couple who've seen rhinos earlier, enjoy pre-dinner cocktails with us. She says this view is "ridiculous". It's dreamy, untrue.

For the Maasai, when Enkai - god and also the sky - lived on earth, the sky and earth were one. Enkai sent all the cattle down the root of the wild fig tree for the Maasai to look after. The Dorobo hunter-gatherers having received none, cut down the sacred rope, causing heaven and earth to split. Here, we could be as the folk from Angama like to call it, between heaven and earth. And that is how the name Angama, came about. It is an unusual Kiswahili word meaning suspended.

The Maasai warrior has my eight year old girl by the hand and leads her to join the dance. His jewellery sparkles where the fire-light catches it and the beauty of it engulfs me. I shudder beneath my warm shuka, from a realisation best explained by Leonard Cohen in his song



"We are so small between the stars, so large against the sky".

We are sitting on top of the Mara Triangle formed by the escarpment to the West, Mara River to the East and Tanzania to the South. It is lunch time and we've opted for a picnic at the site where Meryl Streep and Robert Redford sat in the 1985 film that gave it, its name.

Before the lodge was built, says Daniel, our trusty guide, pointing to scrub marks high on a gnarled tree, elephants would come up all this way, making it less wooded. The path now winds through irrepressible Teclea, orange leafed croton and Leleshwa, their citrus smells filling the air. Lion pull their prey under the croton to keep the flies at bay, so it looks like we might enjoy a bug free lunch of sandwiches, salads and chocolate brownies, carefully packed without the use of plastic. And there on a rocky outcrop is a dewy bucket of something sparkling, with fluted glasses set beside cushions. Kenhaman, our butler, courteously leaves a walky-talky behind, should we need anything.

Tropical Boubou's call each other



from the forest. All but a few gnu have migrated to the Serengeti giving us the chance to spot the rare oribi, and the shy bat-eared fox. A family of mongoose sniff the air mid scurry. Elephants and giraffe prune desert-date trees into the distance. The cheetah is deep in tall grass, the leopard far in the branches of a tree and the pride of lions doesn't even flick an ear when we stop close by. They are all too well fed and languish lazily, where ever they are.

It is spring in the Mara. The road separates a young bull elephant from his mother. Alarmed, he lifts his trunk to warn us and rapidly tramples the wild flowers. We head

back beneath a tempestuous crimson and slate sky. Impala are sitting down. We have been expecting the *el nino* rains and they are yet to come. The glass fronted tents at Angama glint and turn amber, like nocturnal eyes peering down from the kopje. If it rains, I'll flip through Peter Beard's photographs or go on a nomadic odyssey with Mary Ann Fitzgerald, in the library of carefully chosen books and films.

No rain falls that night and I am awakened by my daughter telling me, we are missing the sunrise. Our tents are huge and interconnecting. On the deck, I stretch cat-like, stilled by the allure and vulnerability of life. We are swaddled in Angama's soft woollen blankets and the words of Isak Dinesen; *No domestic animal can be as still as a wild animal. The civilised people have lost the aptitude of stillness and must take lessons in silence from the wild before they are accepted by it.*

I am reminded that this is why we love Africa. And here, I am not sure that the avatars of the gods are not amongst us.

Please visit www.angama.com, for further information.

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